

FIG. 1 (above): **Sarong, lau hada. Lewa, Central Sumba. Late 19th–early 20th century.**

Hand-spun cotton, mud dyed and embroidered with cowrie shell and bead applique.  
110 x 81 cm.  
Collection of Rev. D. K. Wielenga.  
Wereldmuseum 25292.

FIG. 2 (right): **Ceremonial cloth, tampan. Lampung, Sumatra.**

Cotton, natural dyes.  
Supplementary weft. 40.5 x 42 cm.  
Collection of Lin and Emile Deletaille.



# Magie van de Vrouw

## Textiles and Jewelry from Indonesia

By Thomas Murray

With a long and venerable history as an ethnographic art institution, the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam has been recast of late as a museum of fine arts with an emphasis on its collections of Asian and Oceanic art. This new focus is the vision of director Stanley Bremer, who, coming in from the world of business, was charged with making the museum a worthy destination for the public. To do so, he had to think outside the proverbial box, one facet of which includes inviting guest curators from outside the museum to bring in their expertise and thereby shake up and reinvigorate the institution's hallowed halls. For the mu-

seum's present exhibition, *Magie van de Vrouw* (*Magic of Women*), Bremer brought aboard Anne van Cutsem-Vanderstraete, who both organized the show and wrote its catalog. Her work expresses a novel perspective that has proved fresh yet firmly classical.

In choosing Vanderstraete, Bremer brought in someone with deep insight into African cultures and the nature of the shamanic vision. Over the last few years she has authored several books that have been published by Skira and 5 Continents, as well contributing to several of the publications accompanying the Musée Dapper's exhibitions. But by her





FIG. 3 (left):  
**Pendant, taiganja.**  
**Toraja, Sulawesi.**  
Gilt silver. Cire perdue. H: 6 cm.  
Ghysels Collection.

own admission, Vanderstraete is not an expert per se on Indonesian art in general or its textiles in particular. Nonetheless, she brought a discerning eye to the subject and was able to select beautiful and interesting examples to illustrate the themes of the exhibition. To supplement the long-hidden glories drawn from the Wereldmuseum's permanent collection, she asked several collectors to lend their support to her project and from these she was able to borrow previously unknown and unpublished textiles and pieces of jewelry. Apart from those who preferred to stay anonymous, the lenders include Lin and Emile Deletaille, the Ghysels and

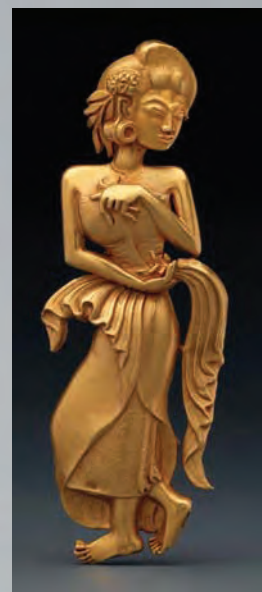
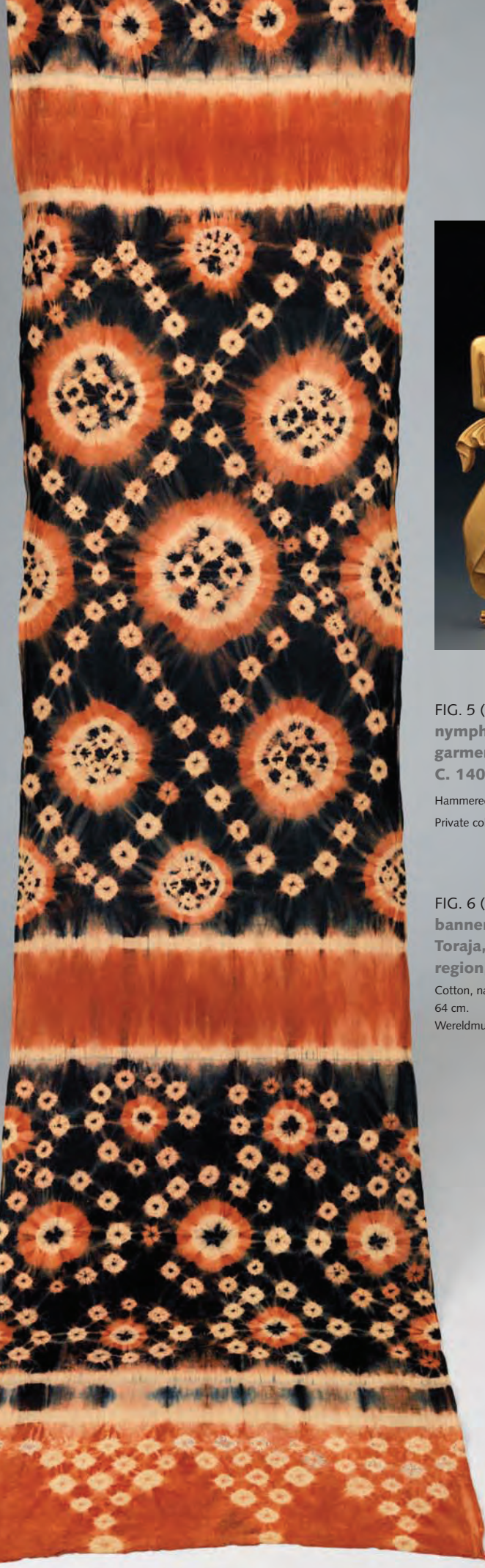


FIG. 5 (above): **Celestial nymph with fine textile garments.** East Java.  
**C. 1400.**

Hammered gold. H: 9.2 cm.  
Private collection.



FIG. 4 (above): **Ceremonial chest ornaments.**  
**Babar or Luang, South Moluccas.**

Gold. Left: D: 19 cm. Mis Family, Brussels. Right: D: 20 cm.  
Ghysels Collection.

FIG. 6 (left): **Ritual banner, poritutu roto.**  
**Toraja, Rongkong region, Sulawesi.**

Cotton, natural dyes. Plangi. 340 x 64 cm.  
Wereldmuseum 26055.





FIG. 7 (above): **Sarong, lau hada. Central Sumba. Late 19th–early 20th century.**

Hand-spun cotton and glass beads, mud dyed. Supplementary warp threads with selective ochre staining imitating gold gilt, embroidery with yarn and beads, knotted fringe. 126 x 82 cm. Collection of D. K. Wielenga. Wereldmuseum 25290.



FIG. 8 (above): **Sarong, lau pahudu. East Sumba. Late 19th–early 20th century.**

Hand-spun imported cotton, natural dyes. Supplementary warp with fringe. 159 x 63 cm. Donated by L. C. Heyling, 1959. Wereldmuseum 49556.



FIG. 9 (below): **Sarong.**  
**Paminggir, Lampung, Sumatra. 18th–19th century.**  
 Hand-spun cotton, silk floss, natural dyes. Warp ikat and embroidery. 119 x 62 cm.  
 Thomas Murray Collection, 10264.



FIG. 10 (above): **Sarong, lau pahudu. East Sumba.**  
 Imported cotton, natural and chemical dyes. Supplementary warp threads, colored yellow.  
 121 x 116 cm. Collection of J. Langewis. Wereldmuseum 58392.







Mis families, and the curator and her husband, René. Forty pieces from the private collection of this reviewer are also included. With such collectors ready to augment a museum collection like that of the Wereldmuseum, the curator had an assured font of exceptional pieces for the exhibition.

Working from this platform, Vanderstraete created a fine exhibition as well as an accompanying catalog. The latter was written in French and translated into both Dutch and English in order to render her insightful essay accessible to a wider public. Also notable are the photography by Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovani and the book's appealing graphic design by Andre Kars.

The exhibition space itself is a wonder, taking up a full two floors of the Wereldmuseum, with each gallery carefully laid out, beautifully presented, and well lit. The installation design permits the textiles and gold ornaments to seemingly

FIG. 11 (left): **Ceremonial cloth, *papori to noling*. Toraja, Sulawesi. C. 1800.**

Hand-spun cotton, natural dyes.  
Warp ikat. 188 x 144 cm.  
Thomas Murray Collection 15820.



float in space. They are presented as the magnificent works of art that they are.

The first lines of the introduction effectively sum up the significance of the title and the theme of the exhibition:

Every act of creation is by definition magical. From a state of inertia, the material takes on shape and substance: cultivating crops, weaving cloth, and fashioning jewelry.

From this premise the curator builds her case. Both in the text of the catalog and on the informative placards placed strategically throughout the exhibition space, she offers a historical introduction to Indonesia, mentioning influences of India, China, Islam, and Europe, as well as insights into their world and cosmic view from the perspective of the tribal psyche. Crucial to this are rites of passage through what anthropologists term “life crisis transitions,” which include birth, puberty initiation, marriage, and death. Specialized rituals evolved to help transport the individual from one stage of life to another, and within that context came costumes and jewelry appropriate for the occasion. These also

FIG. 12 (above): **Ceremonial hanging, *palepai*. Lampung, Sumatra. Late 17th–early 19th century.**

Cotton, natural dyes. Supplementary weft. 60 x 295 cm.  
Thomas Murray Collection 10841.

FIG. 13 (top right): **Sarong. Sulawesi.**

Beaten tree bark, pigments. 110 x 103 cm. Donated by J. H. M. Jacques, 1890. Wereldmuseum 71107.

gave rise to wall hangings and banners to attract the gods and heirloom jewelry in gold and other precious materials to please and appease the ancestors. Each gallery of the exhibition, like each chapter in the book, follows one of these themes.

In general, traditional society is divided between nobles, freemen, and slaves, with the aristocracy being best able to command the resources necessary to create the majority of the masterful textiles and jewelry on display and published in *Magie van de Vrouw*. So, too, certain motifs belong to clans or tribes, and from them can be determined the identity of the wearer and her place in society. Thus the textiles and jewelry are “signifiers” that may be “read” and that provide insight into the who, what, where, when, and how of their ritual context. Of course, in Indonesia rules are usually not hard and fast, and ritual cloths and jewelry may show up at more than one kind of ceremony, but certain types are very specific and would never be found crossing over.

Vanderstraete gives over a gallery in the exhibition and a chapter in the book to techniques, beginning with what is a



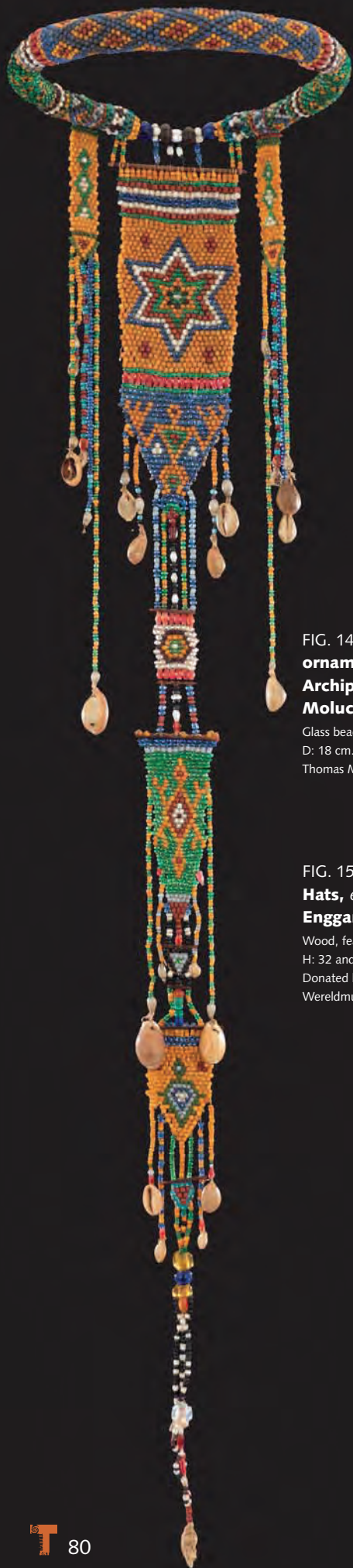


FIG. 14 (left): **Head ornament. Leti Archipelago, South Moluccas. C. 1800.**

Glass beads, shells.  
D: 18 cm.  
Thomas Murray Collection 10521.

FIG. 15 (above right): **Hats, epaku. Enggano. C. 1850.**

Wood, feathers, tinfoil.  
H: 32 and 43 cm.  
Donated by J. A. Aeckerlin, 1886.  
Wereldmuseum 3533 and 3534.



FIG. 16 (below): **Necklace and belt. South Nias.**

Glass beads, fiber, copper, bamboo.  
Necklace: H: 26 cm.  
Belt: L: 85.5 cm.  
Ghysels Collection.





## Textiles and Jewelry from Indonesia

particularly archaic form of creative expression, that of bark cloth. Following that came a technological breakthrough often associated with the Dong Son Bronze Age (late first millennium BC), when the back-strap loom developed, permitting the interlacing of warp and weft threads and hence the manufacture of textiles. Patterns are created on woven cloth using several resist-dye processes including *ikat*, *palangi*, and batik. The symbolic value of color is also considered, beginning with the primary Austronesian colors of black, white, and red, the first two symbolizing duality and the last being the blood of life. Red could be achieved with a root dye, *morinda*, and was often incorporated into the costume of a warrior. Black was expressed by indigo blue, and white came as the color of natural cotton. Ships, trees, and ancestors are recurring themes.

On a personal note, it was with great satisfaction that I viewed some of the highlights of my Indonesian textile collection on display in a venue as important as the Wereldmuseum. This opportunity came about thanks to the encouragement of my oldest friend and mentor in Holland, who would be very cross if I mentioned his name, and the timing was such that I was pleased to participate. Without wanting to be morbid, I will mention that in recent years I have lost too many friends, who, in passing this plane of existence, have taken with them a lifetime's worth of knowledge, insight, and experience, seemingly gone forever. Thus motivated, I felt that the time had come for me to share, and what better place than in the Netherlands, where I have learned so much at museums like the Wereld, the Leiden, and the Tropen through the years? With my contribution to this exhibition, I hope that others' knowledge will be extended, as mine began to be decades ago in the great coun-

try of which Rotterdam is a part.

The pieces that were selected from my collection are ones that I consider to be tremendously important and beautiful, and clearly the same criteria were applied to the material of the other lenders who contributed to the exhibition. I am sure I speak for all of us when I say that Anne Vanderstraete deserves full credit for assembling this remarkable grouping and that we collectively hope that visitors to the show may experience something of a spiritual and aesthetic conversion, a eureka moment. In the words of the Netherlands' greatest contemporary sculptor and leading conceptual artist, Hans van Houwelingen, "When I looked at the greatness of the works of art on view, the depth of symbolic meaning, and the aesthetic beauty of the textiles and jewelry, I knew this was no ordinary show but rather a life-changing exhibit of great importance!"

I could not have said it better myself.

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**Magie van der Vrouw**  
through September 9, 2012  
Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam  
[www.wereldmuseum.nl](http://www.wereldmuseum.nl)



**FIG. 18 (above): Earrings, *saro dalinga*, and necklace, *nifatali*. Nias.**

Earrings: Gold. Hammered and covered with gold leaf. W: 13 cm.  
Necklace: Gold. Wound wire. D: 17 cm. Ghysels Collection.

**FIG. 19 (below): Ritual betel bag and earrings. Ngada, Flores. C. 1750.**

Pendant: Woven gold. H: 13 cm.  
Thomas Murray Collection 10141.  
Earrings: H (with spangles): 10 cm.  
Ghysels Collection.



**FIG. 17 (left): Bracelets, Kalimantan.**

Ivory, bone.  
Pair at left: L: 18 cm.  
Mis Family, Brussels.  
Single below: Diam: 7.5 cm.  
Ghysels Collection.

